

SCENE IV.

(Bessie and Harry. Later Capt. H. from window).

Harry (After a short silence). What on earth's upset him so? What's the meaning of all this fuss? He isn't always like that, is he?

Bessie. I don't know who you are; but I may tell you that his mind has been troubled for years about an only son who ran away from home--a long time ago. Everybody knows that here.

Harry (Thoughtful). Troubled--for years! (Suddenly.) Well, I am the son.

Bessie (Steps back). You! . . . Harry!

Harry (Amused, dry tone). Got hold of my name, eh? Been making friends with the old man?

Bessie (Distressed). Yes... I... sometimes. . . (Rapidly!) He's our landlord.

Harry (Scornfully). Owns both them rabbit hutches, does he? Just a thing he'd be proud of... (Earnest.) And now you had better tell me all about that chap who's coming to-morrow. Know anything of him? I reckon there's more than one in that little game. Come! Out with it! (Chaffing.) I don't take no... from women.

Bessie (Bewildered). Oh! It's so difficult... What had I better do?...

Harry (Good-humoured). Make a clean breast of it.

Bessie (Wildly to herself). Impossible! (Starts.) You don't understand. I must think--see--try to--I, I must have time. Plenty of time.

Harry. What for? Come. Two words. And don't be afraid for yourself. I ain't going to make it a police job. But it's the other fellow that'll get upset when he least expects it. There'll be some fun when he shows his mug here to-morrow. (Snaps fingers.) I don't care that for the old man's dollars, but right is right. You shall see me put a head on that coon, whoever he is.

Bessie (Wrings hands slightly). What had I better do? (Suddenly to Harry.) It's you--you yourself that we--that he's waiting for. It's you who are to come to-morrow.

Harry (Slowly). Oh! it's me! (Perplexed.) There's something there I can't understand. I haven't written ahead or anything. It was my chum who showed me the advertisement with the old boy's address, this very morning--in London.

Bessie (Anxious). How can I make it plain to you without... (Bites her lip, embarrassed.) Sometimes he talks so strangely.

Harry (Expectant). Does he? What about?

Bessie. Only you. And he will stand no contradicting.

Harry. Stubborn. Eh? The old man hasn't changed much from what I can remember. (They stand looking at each other helplessly.)

Bessie. He's made up his mind you would come back . . . to-morrow.

Harry. I can't hang about here till morning. Got no money to get a bed. Not a cent. But why won't to-day do?

Bessie. Because you've been too long away.

Harry (With force). Look here, they fairly drove me out. Poor mother nagged at me for being idle, and the old man said he would cut my soul out of my body rather than let me go to sea.

Bessie (Murmurs). He can bear no contradicting.

Harry (Continuing). Well, it looked as tho' he would do it too. So I went. (Moody.) It seems to me sometimes I was born to them by a mistake... in that other rabbit hutch of a house.

Bessie (A little mocking). And where do you think you ought to have been born by rights?

Harry. In the open--upon a beach--on a windy night.

Bessie (Faintly). Ah!

Harry. They were characters, both of them, by George! Shall I try the door?

Bessie. Wait. I must explain to you why it is to-morrow.

Harry. Aye. That you must, or...

(Window in H.'s cottage runs up.)

Capt. H.'s Voice (Above). A--grinning--information--fellow coming to worry me in my own garden! What next?

(Window rumbles down.)

Bessie. Yes. I must. (Lays hand on Harry's sleeve.) Let's get further off. Nobody ever comes this way after dark.

Harry (Careless laugh). Aye. A good road for a walk with a girl.

(They turn their backs on audience and move up the stage slowly. Close together. Harry bends his head over Bessie.)

Bessie's Voice (Beginning eagerly). People here somehow did not take kindly to him.

Harry's Voice. Aye. Aye. I understand that.

(They walk slowly back towards the front.)

Bessie. He was almost ready to starve himself for your sake.

Harry. And I had to starve more than once for his whim.

Bessie. I'm afraid you've a hard heart. (Remains thoughtful.)

Harry. What for? For running away? (Indignant.) Why, he wanted to make a blamed lawyer's clerk of me.

(From here this scene goes on mainly near and about the street lamp.)

Bessie (Rousing herself). What are you? A sailor?

Harry. Anything you like. (Proudly.) Sailor enough to be worth my salt on board any craft that swims the seas.

Bessie. He will never, never believe it. He mustn't be contradicted.

Harry. Always liked to have his own way. And you've been encouraging him.

Bessie (Earnestly). No!--not in everything--not really!

Harry (Vexed laugh). What about that pretty tomorrow notion? I've a hungry chum in London--waiting for me.

Bessie (Defending herself). Why should I make the poor old friendless man miserable? I thought you were far away. I thought you were dead. I didn't know but you had never been born. I... I... (Harry turns to her. She desperately.) It was easier to believe it myself. (Carried away.) And after all it's true. It's come to pass. This is the to-morrow we've been waiting for.

Harry (Half perfunctorily). Aye. Anybody can see that your heart is as soft as your voice.

Bessie (As if unable to keep back the words). I didn't think you would have noticed my voice.

Harry (Already inattentive). H'm. Dashed scrape. This is a queer to-morrow, without any sort of today, as far as I can see. (Resolutely.) I must try the door.

Bessie. Well--try, then.

Harry (From gate looking over shoulder at Bessie). He ain't likely to fly out at me, is he? I would be afraid of laying my hands on him. The chaps are always telling me I don't know my own strength.

Bessie (In front). He's the most harmless creature that ever. ..

Harry. You wouldn't say so if you had seen him walloping me with a hard leather strap. (Walking up garden.) I haven't forgotten it in sixteen long years. (Rat-tat-tat twice.) Hullo, Dad. (Bessie intensely expectant. Rat-tat-tat.) Hullo, Dad--let me in. I am your own Harry. Straight. Your son Harry come back home--a day too soon.

(Window above rumbles up.)

Capt. H. (Seen leaning out, aiming with spade). Aha! Bessie (Warningly). Look out, Harry! (Spade falls.) Are you hurt? (Window rumbles down.) Harry (In the distance). Only grazed my hat.

Bessie. Thank God! (Intensely.) What'll he do now?

Harry (Comes forward, slamming gate behind him). Just like old times. Nearly

licked the life out of me for wanting to go away, and now I come back he shies a confounded old shovel at my head. (Fumes. Laughs a little). I wouldn't care, only poor little Ginger--Ginger's my chum up in London--he will starve while I walk back all the way from here. (Faces Bessie blankly.) I spent my last twopence on a shave. ... Out of respect for the old man.

Bessie. I think, if you let me, I could manage to talk him round in a week, maybe.

(A muffled periodical bellowing had been heard faintly for some time.)

Harry (On the alert). What's this? Who's making this row? Hark! Bessie, Bessie. It's in your house, I believe.

Bessie (Without stirring, drearily). It's for me.

Harry (Discreetly, whispering). Good voice for a ship's deck in a squall. Your husband? (Steps out of lamplight.)

Bessie. No. My father. He's blind. (Pause). I'm not married.

(Bellowings grow louder.)

Harry. Oh, I say. What's up? Who's murdering him?

Bessie (Calmly). I expect he's finished his tea. (Bellowing continues regularly.)

Harry. Hadn't you better see to it? You'll have the whole town coming out here presently. (Bessie moves off.) I say! (Bessie stops.) Couldn't you scare up some bread and butter for me from that tea? I'm hungry. Had no breakfast.

Bessie (Starts off at the word "hungry," dropping to the ground the white woollen shawl). I won't be a minute. Don't go away.

Harry (Alone; picks up shawl absently, and, looking at it spread out in his hands, pronounces slowly). A--dam'--silly--scrape. (Pause. Throws shawl on arm. Strolls up and down. Mutters.) No money to get back. (Louder.) Silly little Ginger'll think I've got hold of the pieces and given an old shipmate the go by. One good shove-- (Makes motion of bursting in door with his shoulders)--would burst that door in-- I bet. (Looks about.) I wonder where the nearest bobby is! No. They would want to bundle me neck and crop into chokey. (Shudders.) Perhaps. It makes me dog sick to think of being locked up. Haven't got the nerve. Not for prison. (Leans against lamp-post.) And not a cent for my fare. I wonder if that girl now...

Bessie (Coming hastily forward, plate with bread and meat in hand). I didn't take time to get anything else....

Harry (Begins to eat). You're not standing treat to a beggar. My dad is a rich man--you know.

Bessie (Plate in hand). You resemble your father.

Harry. I was the very image of him in face from a boy--(Eats)--and that's about as far as it goes. He was always one of your domestic characters. He looked sick when he had to go to sea for a fortnight's trip. (Laughs.) He was all for house and home.

Bessie. And you? Have you never wished for a home? (Goes off with empty plate and puts it down hastily on Carvil's bench--out of sight.)

Harry (Left in front). Home! If I found myself shut up in what the old man calls a home, I would kick it down about my ears on the third day--or else go to bed and die before the week was out. Die in a house--ough!

Bessie (Returning; stops and speaks from garden railing). And where is it that you would wish to die?

Harry. In the bush, in the sea, on some blamed mountain-top for choice. No such luck, tho', I suppose.

Bessie (From distance). Would that be luck? Harry. Yes! For them that make the whole world their home.

Bessie (Comes forward shyly). The world's a cold home--they say.

Harry (A little gloomy). So it is. When a man's done for.

Bessie. You see! (Taunting). And a ship's not so very big after all.

Harry. No. But the sea is great. And then what of the ship! You love her and leave her, Miss--Bessie's your name--isn't it?... I like that name.

Bessie. You like my name! I wonder you remembered it.... That's why, I suppose.

Harry (Slight swagger in voice). What's the odds! As long as a fellow has lived. And a voyage isn't a marriage--as we sailors say.

Bessie. So you're not married--(Movement of Harry)--to any ship.

Harry (Soft laugh). Ship! I've loved and left more of them than I can remember. I've been nearly everything you can think of but a tinker or a soldier; I've been a boundary rider; I've sheared sheep and humped my swag and harpooned a whale; I've rigged ships and skinned dead bullocks and prospected for gold--and turned my back on more money than the old man would have scraped together in his whole life.

Bessie (Thoughtfully). I could talk him over in a week. . . .

Harry (Negligently). I dare say you could. (Joking.) I don't know but what I could make shift to wait if you only promise to talk to me now and then. I've grown quite fond of your voice. I like a right woman's voice.

Bessie (Averted head). Quite fond! (Sharply.) Talk! Nonsense! Much you'd care. (Businesslike.) Of course I would have to sometimes.... (Thoughtful again.) Yes. In a week--if--if only I knew you would try to get on with him afterwards.

Harry (Leaning against lamp-post; growls through his teeth). More humouring. Ah! well, no! (Hums significantly)

Oh, oh, oh, Rio, . . . And fare thee well My bonnie young girl, We're
bound for Rio Grande.

Bessie (Shivering). What's this?

Harry. Why! The chorus of an up-anchor tune. Kiss and go. A deep-water ship's good-bye.... You are cold. Here's that thing of yours I've picked up and forgot there on my arm. Turn round a bit. So. (Wraps her up--commanding.) Hold the ends together in front.

Bessie (Softly). A week is not so very long.

Harry (Begins violently). You think that I-----

(Stops with sidelong look at her.) I can't dodge about in ditches and live on air and water. Can I? I haven't any money--you know.

Bessie. He's been scraping and saving up for years. All he has is for you, and perhaps...

Harry (Interrupts). Yes. If I come to sit on it like a blamed toad in a hole. Thank

you.

Bessie (Angrily). What did you come for, then?

Harry (Promptly). For five quid--(Pause.)--after a jolly good spree.

Bessie (Scathingly). You and that--that--chum of yours have been drinking.

Harry (Laughs). Don't fly out, Miss Bessie--dear. Ginger's not a bad little chap. Can't take care of himself, tho'. Blind three days. (Serious.) Don't think I am given that way. Nothing and nobody can get over me unless I like. I can be as steady as a rock.

Bessie (Murmurs). Oh! I don't think you are bad.

Harry (Approvingly). You're right there. (Impulsive.) Ask the girls all over----- (Checks himself.) Ginger, he's long-headed, too, in his way--mind you. He sees the paper this morning, and says he to me, 'Hallo! Look at that, Harry--loving parent--that's five quid, sure.' So we scraped all our pockets for the fare....

Bessie (Unbelieving). You came here for that.

Harry (Surprised). What else would I want here? Five quid isn't much to ask for--once in sixteen years. (Through his teeth with a sidelong look at B.) And now I am ready to go--for my fare.

Bessie (Clasping her hands). Whoever heard a man talk like this before! I can't believe you mean it?

Harry. What? That I would go? You just try and see.

Bessie (Disregarding him). Don't you care for anyone? Didn't you ever want anyone in the world to care for you?

Harry. In the world! (Boastful.) There's hardly a place you can go in the world where you wouldn't find somebody that did care for Harry Hagberd. (Pause.) I'm not of the sort that go about skulking under false names.

Bessie. Somebody--that means a woman.

Harry. Well! And if it did.

Bessie (Unsteadily). Oh, I see how it is. You get round them with your soft

speeches, your promises, and then...

Harry (Violently). Never!

Bessie (Startled, steps back). Ah--you never. . .

Harry (Calm). Never yet told a lie to a woman.

Bessie. What lie?

Harry. Why, the lie that comes glib to a man's tongue. None of that for me. I leave the sneaking off to them soft-spoken chaps you're thinking of. No! If you love me you take me. And if you take me--why, then, the capstan-song of deep-water ships is sure to settle it all some fine day.

Bessie (After a short pause, with effort). It's like your ships, then.

Harry (Amused). Exactly, up to now. Or else I wouldn't be here in a silly fix.

Bessie (Assumed indifference). Perhaps it's because you've never yet met-----
(Voice fails.)

Harry (Negligently). Maybe. And perhaps never shall.... What's the odds? It's the looking for a thing.... No matter. I love them all--ships and women. The scrapes they got me into, and the scrapes they got me out of--my word! I say, Miss Bessie, what are you thinking of?

Bessie (Lifts her head). That you are supposed never to tell a lie.

Harry. Never, eh? You wouldn't be that hard on a chap.

Bessie (Recklessly). Never to a woman, I mean.

Harry. Well, no. (Serious.) Never anything that matters. (Aside.) I don't seem to get any nearer to my railway fare. (Leans wearily against the lamppost with a far-off look. B. looks at him.)

Bessie. Now what are you thinking of?

Harry (Turns his head; stares at B.). Well, I was thinking what a fine figure of a girl you are.

Bessie (Looks away a moment). Is that true, or is it only one of them that don't

matter?

Harry (Laughing a little). No! no! That's true. Haven't you ever been told that before? The men...

Bessie. I hardly speak to a soul from year's end to year's end. Father's blind. He don't like strangers, and he can't bear to think of me out of his call. Nobody comes near us much.

Harry (Absent-minded). Blind--ah! of course.

Bessie. For years and years . . .

Harry (Commiserating). For years and years. In one of them hutches. You are a good daughter. (Brightening up.) A fine girl altogether. You seem the sort that makes a good chum to a man in a fix. And there's not a man in this whole town who found you out? I can hardly credit it, Miss Bessie. (B. shakes her head.) Man I said! (Contemptuous.) A lot of tame rabbits in hutches I call them.... (Breaks off.) I say, when's the last train up to London? Can you tell me?

Bessie (Gazes at him steadily). What for? You've no money.

Harry. That's just it. (Leans back against post again.) Hard luck. (Insinuating.) But there was never a time in all my travels that a woman of the right sort did not turn up to help me out of a fix. I don't know why. It's perhaps because they know without telling that I love them all. (Playful.) I've almost fallen in love with you, Miss Bessie.

Bessie (Unsteady laugh). Why! How you talk! You haven't even seen my face properly. (One step towards H., as if compelled.)

Harry (Bending forward gallantly). A little pale. It suits some. (Puts out his hand, catches hold of B.'s arm. Draws her to him.) Let's see.... Yes, it suits you. (It's a moment before B. puts up her hands, palms out, and turns away her head.)

Bessie (Whispering). Don't. (Struggles a little. Released, stands averted.)

Harry. No offence. (Stands, back to audience, looking at H.'s cottage.)

Bessie (Alone in front; faces audience; whispers). My voice--my figure--my heart--my face....

(A silence. B. 's face gradually lights up. Directly H. speaks, expression of hopeful

attention.)

Harry (From railings). The old man seems to have gone to sleep waiting for that to-morrow of his.

Bessie. Come away. He sleeps very little.

Harry (Strolls down). He has taken an everlasting jamming hitch round the whole business. (Vexed.) Cast it loose who may. (Contemptuous exclamation.) To-morrow. Pooh! It'll be just another mad today.

Bessie. It's the brooding over his hope that's done it. People teased him so. It's his fondness for you that's troubled his mind.

Harry. Aye. A confounded shovel on the head. The old man had always a queer way of showing his fondness for me.

Bessie. A hopeful, troubled, expecting old man--left alone--all alone.

Harry (Lower tone). Did he ever tell you what mother died of?

Bessie. Yes. (A little bitter.) From impatience.

Harry (Makes a gesture with his arm; speaks vaguely but with feeling). I believe you have been very good to my old man....

Bessie (Tentative). Wouldn't you try to be a son to him?

Harry (Angrily). No contradicting; is that it? You seem to know my dad pretty well. And so do I. He's dead nuts on having his own way--and I've been used to have my own too long. It's the deuce of a fix.

Bessie. How could it hurt you not to contradict him for a while--and perhaps in time you would get used. ..

Harry (Interrupts sulkily). I ain't accustomed to knuckle under. There's a pair of us. Hagberd's both. I ought to be thinking of my train.

Bessie (Earnestly). Why? There's no need. Let us get away up the road a little.

Harry (Through his teeth). And no money for the fare. (Looks up.) Sky's come overcast. Black, too. It'll be a wild, windy night... to walk the high road on. But I and wild nights are old friends wherever the free wind blows.

Bessie (Entreating). No need. No need. (Looks apprehensively at Hagberd's cottage. Takes a couple of steps up as if to draw Harry further off. Harry follows. Both stop.)

Harry (After waiting). What about this tomorrow whim?

Bessie. Leave that to me. Of course all his fancies are not mad. They aren't. (Pause.) Most people in this town would think what he had set his mind on quite sensible. If he ever talks to you of it, don't contradict him. It would--it would be dangerous.

Harry (Surprised). What would he do?

Bessie. He would--I don't know--something rash.

Harry (Startled). To himself?

Bessie. No. It'd be against you--I fear.

Harry (Sullen). Let him.

Bessie. Never. Don't quarrel. But perhaps he won't even try to talk to you of it. (Thinking aloud.) Who knows what I can do with him in a week! I can, I can, I can--I must.

Harry. Come--what's this sensible notion of his that I mustn't quarrel about?

Bessie (Turns to Harry, calm, forcible). If I make him once see that you've come back, he will be as sane as you or I. All his mad notions will be gone. But that other is quite sensible. And you mustn't quarrel over it.

(Moves up to back of stage. Harry follows a little behind, away from audience.)

Harry's Voice (Calm). Let's hear what it is.

(Voices cease. Action visible as before. Harry steps back and walks hastily down. Bessie at his elbow, follows with her hands clasped?)

(Loud burst of voice.)

Harry (Raving to and fro). No! Expects me--a home. Who wants his home?... What I want is hard work, or an all-fired racket, or more room than there is in the

whole of England. Expects me! A man like me--for his rotten money--there ain't enough money in the world to turn me into a blamed tame rabbit in a hutch. (He stops suddenly before Bessie, arms crossed on breast. Violently.) Don't you see it?

Bessie (Terrified, stammering faintly). Yes. Yes. Don't look at me like this. (Sudden scream.) Don't quarrel with him. He's mad!

Harry (Headlong utterance). Mad! Not he. He likes his own way. Tie me up by the neck here. Here! Ha! Ha! Ha! (Louder.) And the whole world is not a bit too big for me to spread my elbows in, I can tell you--what's your name--Bessie. (Rising scorn). Marry! Wants me to marry and settle.... (Scathingly.) And as likely as not he has looked out the girl too--dash my soul. Talked to you about it--did he? And do you happen to know the Judy--may I ask?

(Window in Hagberd's cottage runs up. They start and stand still.)

Capt. H. (Above, begins slowly). A grinning information fellow from a crazy town. (Voice changes.) Bessie, I see you. . . .

Bessie (Shrill). Captain Hagberd! Say nothing. You don't understand. For heaven's sake don't.

Capt. H. Send him away this minute, or I will tell Harry. They know nothing of Harry in this crazy town. Harry's coming home to-morrow. Do you hear? One day more!

(Silence.)

Harry (Mutters). Well!--he is a character.

Capt. H. (Chuckles softly). Never you fear! The boy shall marry you. (Sudden anger.) He'll have to. I'll make him. Or, if not--(Furious)--I'll cut him off with a shilling, and leave everything to you. Jackanapes! Let him starve!

(Window rumbles down.)

Harry (Slowly). So it's you--the girl. It's you! Now I begin to see.... By heavens, you have a heart as soft as your woman's voice.

Bessie (Half averted, face in hands). You see! Don't come near me.

Harry (Makes a step towards her). I must have another look at your pale face.

Bessie (Turns unexpectedly and pushes him with both hands; Harry staggers back and stands still; Bessie, fiercely). Go away.

Harry (Watching her). Directly. But women always had to get me out of my scrapes. I am a beggar now, and you must help me out of my scrape.

Bessie (Who at the word "beggar" had begun fumbling in the pocket of her dress, speaks wildly). Here it is. Take it. Don't look at me. Don't speak to me!

Harry (Swaggers up under the lamp; looks at coin in his palm). Half-a-quad. . . My fare!

Bessie (Hands clenched). Why are you still here?

Harry. Well, you are a fine figure of a girl. My word. I've a good mind to stop--for a week.

Bessie (Pain and shame). Oh!... What are you waiting for? If I had more money I would give it all, all. I would give everything I have to make you go--to make you forget you had ever heard my voice and seen my face. (Covers face with hands.)

Harry (Sombre, watches her). No fear! I haven't forgotten a single one of you in the world. Some've given me more than money. No matter. You can't buy me in--and you can't buy yourself out. . .

(Strides towards her. Seizes her arms. Short struggle. Bessie gives way. Hair falls loose. H. kisses her forehead, cheeks, lips, then releases her. Bessie staggers against railings.)

(Exit Harry; measured walk without haste)

Bessie (Staring eyes, hair loose, back against railings; calls out). Harry! (Gathers up her skirts and runs a little way) Come back, Harry. (Staggers forward against lamp-post) Harry! (Much lower) Harry! (In a whisper) Take me with you. (Begins to laugh, at first faintly, then louder.)

(Window rumbles up, and Capt. H.'s chuckle mingles with Bessie's laughter, which abruptly stops.)

Capt. H. (Goes on chuckling; speaks cautiously). Is he gone yet, that information fellow? Do you see him anywhere, my dear?

Bessie (Low and stammering). N-no, no! (Totters away from lamp-post) I don't see

him.

Capt. H. (Anxious). A grinning vagabond, my dear. Good girl. It's you who drove him away. Good girl.

(Stage gradually darkens)

Bessie. Go in; be quiet! You have done harm enough.

Capt. H. (Alarmed). Why. Do you hear him yet, my dear?

Bessie (Sobs, drooping against the railings). No! No! I don't. I don't hear him any more.

Capt. H. (Triumphant). Now we shall be all right, my dear, till our Harry comes home to-morrow. (Affected gurgling laugh.)

Bessie (Distracted). Be quiet. Shut yourself in. You will make me mad. (Losing control of herself, repeats with rising infection) You make me mad.

(With despair) There is no to-morrow! (Sinks to ground near middle railings. Low sobs)

(Stage darkens perceptibly.)

Capt. H. (Above, in a voice suddenly dismayed and shrill).

What! What do you say, my dear? No to-morrow? (Broken, very feebly.) No--to-morrow?

(Window runs down)

Carvil (Heard within, muffled bellowing). Bessie--Bessie--Bessie-- Bessie----- (At the first call Bessie springs up and begins to stumble blindly towards the door. A faint flash of lightnings followed by a very low rumble of thunder) You!--Bessie!

CURTAIN